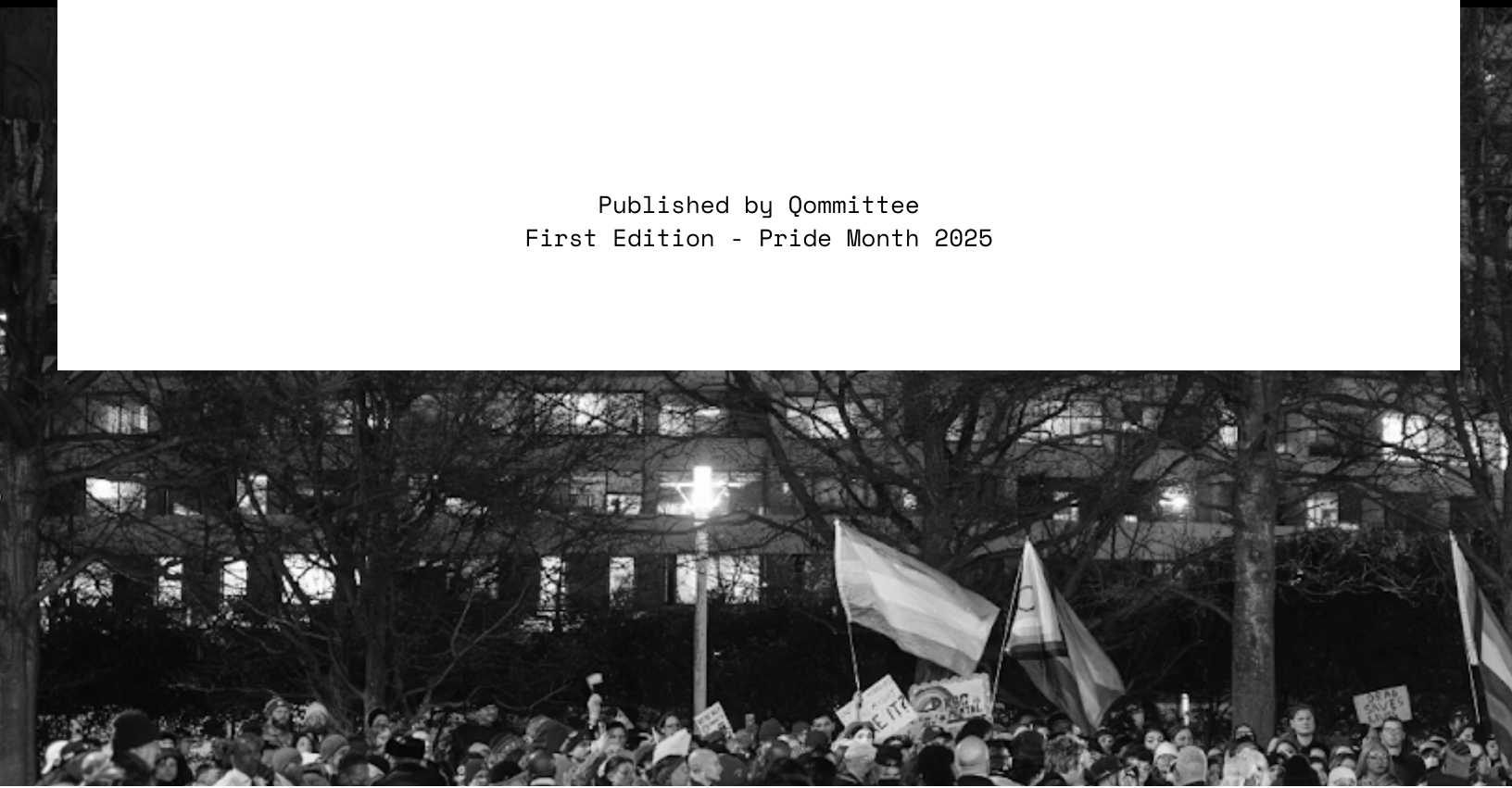
DRAG DEFENSE HANDBOOK

Joy, Free Speech, and Safety

Published by Qommittee
First Edition - Pride Month 2025



About the Drag Defense Handbook

The Drag Defense Handbook is created with, by, and for drag artists to respond to an ongoing epidemic of threats, harassment, bans, and discrimination. Performers have always had master performance, production, promotion, dance, make-up, and costuming. They must now also know how to assert their legal rights, organize and advocate, respond in a crisis, secure digital platforms, and protect themselves and their communities.

This handbook draws from the wisdom and experiences of impacted drag performers, attorneys, and community organizers on the front lines of censorship, bomb threats, doxxing, and more.

We urge all U.S. based drag performers to join our Drag Alert & Action List. Sign up at wwww.qommittee.org.

This is a living document. Please reach out to DragisJoy@qommittee.org to provide ideas, updates, case studies or corrections.

Messages from Drag Performers About the Drag Defense Handbook

"Drag is more than an art form—it's an act of courage, freedom, and defiance. When we face threats, we're not just defending our performances, but our fundamental right to exist authentically in public spaces. This handbook is a shield, a megaphone, and a hand to hold when you need it most."

— Blaq Dinamyte, DC-based drag king and President of Qommittee

"What makes us unbreakable is our shared knowledge and solidarity. We're still here, still creating joy. This handbook transforms our collective trauma into power—we urge all to use it, read it and make it even better."

— Veranda L'ni, Cleveland, OH performer and Qo-Founder of Qommittee

"We deserve to perform without fear, and this handbook helps ensure that those who target us face consequences while we continue to thrive and create."

– Maxine LaQueene, Austin, TX performer and Co-Founder of Committee

"The threat is not your fault, you didn't bring it on yourself, and there is no shame in who we are or how we handle the threat. Our best resource is our community—we keep us safe."

– Freddie Hercury, Buffalo, NY performer and member of Committee's Peer Support Collective

"I'm hoping this handbook will give performers a slight leg-up on their response to any threats or bans. If you are going to continue performing in our increasingly hostile country, you have to be prepared to fight harder than normal for your right to exist in public. Get creative, be bold, and refuse to let your joy be stolen."

– Cali Je, Idaho performer and member of Committee's Peer Support Collective

"A sense of community and its spirit, some validation of our work and craft, and most importantly a sense of safety and knowing they are supported. Because I had to navigate through my own journey on my own. I believe it's everyone's responsibility to make life easier for the generation that comes after them."

– Brittany Lynn, Philadelphia, PA performer and founder of Philly Drag Mafia

"As the showrunner of Draggieland, I felt a deep responsibility to review this handbook because our performers aren't just artists. Drag is a form of resistance, making performers the frontline voices when our existence is politicized and threatened. To express oneself, especially in drag, is and should be a human right."

– Angelo Rios, Draggieland Showrunner for the Texas A&M Queer Empowerment Council (TAMU QEC)

“I know what it feels like to stand up for your community and be told to sit back down. I reviewed this because I’ve lived it. And because I want the next person who gets targeted or silenced to have something I didn’t: a clear guide, a sense of power, and the knowledge that they’re not crazy for fighting back.”

– Mitski Avalox, Utah-based performer and founder of the Southern Utah Drag Stars

INTRODUCTION: One Year of Qommittee

> "Drag is joy, but it's under attack. Our very existence, our self-expression, our art—all of it is being threatened. **And we've had enough.**"

Those words were first published in Qommittee's founding Call to Action on May 29, 2024. The Call to Action was issued by 10 drag performers from across the country who had faced mass shootings, armed protests, bombings, doxxings, harassment and loss of income, of life, of community and sense of safety as their art has come under attack in recent years.

The call to action demands safety, freedom, the right to perform and to free expression for all people. It calls for performers and allies across the country to join together in support of a new organization, led by drag performers, to protect themselves and their art, to spread joy and to make a difference in communities.

The signers gave themselves one year to see if a viable organization was possible-for performers and organizers to grow together, do good work, and build an organization from scratch—without wealth, without backing, without budget—with just their tenacity, charisma and volunteer power.

YEAR ONE: Establish Viability and Do Great Work

This handbook comes out one year since this call to action was issued. In our first year, we have proven that an organization is viable and that there is a clear and unquestionable need for the work that we do. During that time, Qo-Founders and Qommunity Organizers have been at work to establish the basics of a new organization, build a diverse constituency of drag performers, kick ass, and spread joy. Since then, we have:

- Worked directly with over 20 performers who have been directly impacted by bomb threats, doxxings, threats of shootings, protests, online harassment, and more, providing crisis counseling, connections to attorneys, assistance in working with the media and law enforcement, and organizing communities to show solidarity.

- Fought hard at national and regional levels to fight bans and hold law enforcement accountable for responding to threats and bans.

- Established the basics of a national organization through partnerships with attorneys and groups like the Equality Action Legal Fund for legal aid, the Movement Strategy Center as our fiscal sponsor for our 501c3, the Qommittee for Qreative Freedom, MoveOn to build a network of action takers, ReThink Media to grow our national voice, and the DMV Social Activist Collective to respond to threats to free speech by the new administration. The result? A 501c3 and 501c4, an established website and media presence, a network of almost 50,000 action takers, and dozens of monthly small dollar donors and drag performers from all parts of the country.

We launched ahead of Pride Month 2024 because that's often the only time of year when the artform of drag is performed in many communities. Alongside that joy also comes more threats, bans and violence.

As we head into Pride Month 2025, we're paying forward what we've learned over the past year. We expect these threats to be much worse. We expect more ambivalence or hostility from law enforcement, we expect hate groups to be emboldened with more threats, harassment and intimidation of performers, and we expect even more bans on free speech.

Ahead of Pride Month, we've launched our Peer Support Qollective to train and activate drag performers to provide mutual support and we're publishing the Drag Defense Handbook to ensure this knowledge gets circulated broadly.

WHAT'S NEXT: Becoming a Sustainable Organization

In our second year, we must prove that we can be sustainable. We've secured no grants or major donations, employed no staff, and have self-taught how to do crisis response, advocacy and organizing using direct relationships.

This handbook is part of becoming that sustainable organization. It collects the lessons we've learned in our first year and pays them forward into a shareable resource that any performer under duress or ally can find, see themselves in and use to respond in their own community.

As Qommittee enters its second year, we seek more partners in becoming a sustainable organization that can do this work more reliably and efficiently and in ways that empower drag performers in communities under threat. We need fundraisers, volunteers and more drag performers to spread the word and take action against hate.

We welcome all allies, donors, and drag performers to join us at www.qommittee.org.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMERS

This Is Not Legal Advice

While this handbook was developed in consultation with legal experts and reflects legal strategies that have been successful for drag performers, it does not constitute legal advice. The information provided is for educational and informational purposes only.

Laws vary significantly by state and locality, and each situation has unique factors that may affect legal outcomes. When facing serious threats, bans, or discrimination, you should consult with qualified legal counsel for advice specific to your circumstances.

Qommittee, the Qommittee for Qreative Freedom, and the contributors to this handbook make no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy, completeness, or timeliness of the information contained herein. By using this handbook, you understand and agree that neither Qommittee nor any contributors to this handbook are acting as your attorney, and no attorney-client relationship is created.

Remember that laws, regulations, and legal interpretations change over time. This handbook reflects our understanding as of May 2025, but legal standards and protections may evolve.

Don't Wait To Be In Crisis To Build Relationships: ORGANIZE!

When it comes to threats against drag, your local community is the first line of defense. The best time to build relationships with other performers, venues, allies is before you're in a crisis. Reach out to one another and join Qommittee's network of performers and allies at www.qommittee.org/join.

Qommittee is a volunteer-operated network that can provide background information, best practices we've seen from other attacks and threats, and peer support.

National legal and LGBTQ+ organizations have spoken out, filed lawsuits and created important resources and reports about attacks on drag performers—but in almost all cases we've seen—performers must work with their own local resources to protect themselves.

Don't wait to build relationships and community for mutual support and defense.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CRISIS RESPONSE | 8

Steps to take when facing active threats or harassment

ONLINE HARASSMENT AND DIGITAL SECURITY | 10

Protecting your online presence and personal information

THREATS OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT | 19

Handling, reporting and responding violent threats and harassment

FIRST AMENDMENT PROTECTIONS | 28

Know your rights against free speech bans and censorship

PROTECTIONS AGAINST DEFAMATION | 34

Responding to false accusations and harmful claims

EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION | 38

Rights in the workplace and professional settings

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES | 40

Supporting your wellbeing while under attack

"I hope performers walk away from this handbook feeling powerful, informed, and not alone. This isn't just a list of precautions—it's a toolkit for survival, joy, and resistance. When our art is under attack, knowing our rights becomes part of the performance."

–Mitski Avalox

CRISIS RESPONSE:
Immediate Steps if Under Attack

Threats of violence and harassment at drag shows are shockingly commonplace across the country. Bomb, mass shooting and death threats, armed protests, attacks and intimidation are compounded by a severe and justifiable trust deficit between drag performers and law enforcement—who can be seen as hostile or ambivalent.

Threats of violence against drag performers or venues require immediate attention to both safety and legal documentation. When facing harassment or threats, quick action can help protect both your safety and legal rights. First, ensure your immediate safety. Contact 911 if in immediate danger and ensure that you have community support to ensure you are not alone in this.

These threats are often criminal acts and taking steps to ensure security, to alert law enforcement, to do community organizing and engage with the media and policymakers can make an important difference.

A NOTE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

Police have inflicted (and continue to inflict) violence against marginalized communities. Many LGBTQ+ people—especially those who are trans, people of color, undocumented, or sex workers— face valid concerns about involving law enforcement. It's important to consider your specific community's relationship with local law enforcement, and the risks that police engagement may pose to vulnerable community members.

Document Everything

Documentation is crucial for any action taken by courts, social media companies, or law enforcement. It's often up to victims to do the hard and thorough documentation of everything about threats while they're occurring. Keep records and screenshots of:

- All threatening messages, posts, or communications
- Dates, times, and locations of incidents
- Metadata capturing dates, times, and locations of incidents might be preserved in photos/videos taken on your phone, make sure it is enabled
- Any information about perpetrators, including names, contact information, biographical information
- All communication with venues, law enforcement, or officials
- Screenshots of social media posts before they're deleted, including the date/time of the post(s) with poster's name
- Any related news coverage or public statements
- Names and contact information of witnesses. Ask trusted eyewitnesses to write detailed accounts as close in time to the incident as possible, to preserve details they may not remember later

Find a Trusted Community Witness for Law Enforcement Engagement

Not all drag artists have trusting relationships with law enforcement. In these cases, drag artists should consider finding a trusted community leader of some prominence or history with police to witness and advocate during interactions. This person:

- Could be an elected official, nonprofit leader, businessperson, civic activist
- Will witness law enforcement interactions
- Can advocate with you to ensure police are doing their job

Local and Federal Law Enforcement Reports

- Have a community witness present for interactions
- Get case numbers and officer names
- Request copies of all reports
- Follow up consistently on investigations
- Consider involving LGBTQ+ liaison officers, if available
- Contact your local FBI field office for serious and terroristic threats

Social Media Platform Reports

- Report threatening content to social media platforms. Follow up if initial reports are unsuccessful
- Document report numbers and responses
- Save screenshots before content is removed (include date/time and account name)

> **"It can be hard to contact authorities. You don't want to cancel the show, it's easy to dismiss or downplay your fears, and there's valid hesitation to involve law enforcement. But I chose to alert the FBI when my venue got a bomb threat and in that case, it was the right course of action."**
>
> **–Freddie Hercury**

ONLINE HARASSMENT AND DIGITAL SECURITY

Threats and harassment facing drag performers often starts out online. Online mobs track drag performers—especially those who are known to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, who participate in all-ages events, or who are employed in fields like education—and stalk their pages, "doxx" them by revealing personal, employment, or contact information about them, and/or threaten them online or in-person.

Preventing Attacks: Create Digital Security Protocols

1. Account Security Fundamentals

- Use strong, unique passwords for all accounts
- Enable two-factor authentication wherever available
- Keep software updated on all devices
- Regularly audit your digital presence — Search for yourself monthly to identify information leaks
- Backup your devices and important documents on external hard-drives
- Use a regular data removal service, such as EasyOptOuts.

2. Identity Separation Strategies

- Maintain distinct accounts with different usernames, photos, and contact information for your personal and drag personas
- Use a P.O. box or virtual address for performer correspondence
- Consider a performer-only phone number through services like Google Voice
- Establish professional boundaries about what personal information venues can share
- Regularly check tagged photos on all platforms and request removal of connecting content

STOP AND CONSIDER

- Does your drag account have your government name on it?
- Do you link to other personal accounts, or list your personal email or phone number on your drag account?
- Have you shared details about where you live and work, or places you frequent?
- Have you shared info that a malicious actor could use against you?

3. Audience Management Approaches

- Create tiered access systems - Public content for general audience, private groups for verified fans
- Develop a vetting process for adding followers to restricted content
- Work with trusted community members to help monitor and moderate comments

Emergency Response Plan

If you're facing active online harassment or doxxing:

1. Secure accounts immediately - Change passwords, enable additional security features
2. Document everything - Screenshots, video records, timestamps, URLs
3. Alert your support network - Let trusted people know what's happening
4. Evaluate physical security - Consider temporary relocation if your address is exposed
5. Report through formal channels - File reports with platforms, Internet service providers, and law enforcement
6. Connect with advocacy organizations like Qommittee or local LGBTQ+ centers

Digital Security Resources

Electronic Frontier Foundation

- Focus: Digital rights, surveillance protection
- Website: eff.org/issues/security

Digital First Aid Kit

- Focus: Emergency digital security response
- Website: digitalfirstaid.org

Doxxing

In recent years, drag artists have increasingly become targets of coordinated online harassment, including a dangerous tactic known as “doxxing.” Doxxing occurs when individuals publicly share sensitive personal information—such as home addresses, emails and phone numbers, or workplace details—without consent, often with the intent to intimidate the performer and/or incite others to cause harm.

Earlier in this section, we covered some preventative strategies for online harassment, including the importance of refraining from sharing personal details on your drag social media accounts. However, if someone doxxes a drag artist, the artist should take immediate steps to protect themselves and mitigate the damage.

First: Gather evidence.

- Document everything related to the doxxing incident. Take screenshots, note down usernames and URLs, any identifiable information about the doxxer, and compile any communications related to the doxxing.

If your address was doxxed:

- Notify all others living in your household. Come up with a plan to identify risks and an agreed-upon course of action if a threatening individual shows up.

- If you live in a building that has a reception area, ask security not to share your apartment number or let anyone who claims to know you in without your permission.

- Consider extra security measures, such as installing a doorbell camera. A camera may document crucial evidence in the case of vandalism or harassment on your property.

- If an out-of-state address was doxxed, and is still active with family, contact local PD, explain the situation, and ask for a wellness check if appropriate.

If your phone number or email was doxxed:

- Obtain a new email/phone number and switch over your personal accounts. However, maintain ownership of the doxxed email/number if possible. Losing access to that email/number means it could be used to impersonate you.

- Document any threatening emails or calls.

If your workplace was doxxed:

- Notify your employer of the situation, explaining that you are being targeted and are at risk for harassment. If possible, meet with HR to deescalate and temper the impacts of harassment, especially if the harassment includes defamatory accusations.

- Inquire about implementing extra security measures, such as removing your name and contact information from company websites and directories, or a temporary work-from-home plan.

- Work with colleagues to create a plan in case harassment occurs at your workplace.

What next?

Social Media Takedown Requests:

If a user account has targeted/doxxed you on social media, you may submit a takedown request to the platform, in accordance with the platform's rules and requirements.

We recommend the "How to Report Doxxing to Online Platforms" guide from DeleteMe which covers eight popular social media platforms.

If the content is posted on a website operated by the individual(s) who doxxed you, you may still be able to request that it be taken down by contacting the web hosting service. Many companies that provide such services have their own community standards/acceptable use policies and allow visitors to report abuse. You can find out which platform hosts a website by entering its URL into this database: https://lookup.icann.org/en

> **"If they're making videos, get people to dislike and report them. Don't watch it, because they can make money from views."**
>
> **–Jack King Goff**

Legal Action:

Simply compiling or publishing publicly available information (including names and addresses) is rarely illegal. There is currently no explicit federal protection for doxxing victims, and other protections vary by state. But doxxing that is driven by an intent to target individuals may trigger criminal conduct like stalking, harassment, identity theft, or incitement to violence. In some cases, existing laws against cyberharassment and digital abuse have been applied. Consult with a legal professional in your jurisdiction for guidance.

STATES WITH SOME FORM OF ANTI-DOXXING LAW

ARIZONA
CALIFORNIA
COLORADO
ILLINOIS
NEVADA
OREGON
TEXAS

Individuals should use their own judgement when deciding if they want to contact law enforcement if you are not being directly threatened. While reporting and documenting it with the police may be useful, they might not do anything unless there is a credible threat of physical harm that triggers another law like stalking or harassment.

However, police reports are the first step in the chain of law enforcement's involvement on any level, and having one for your records can be useful down the road, even if it seems extreme in the moment. Police are always obligated to take a report from you. If you do reach out to the police, research your local police department and see if they have detectives who are assigned to online issues.

It is vital that you be your best advocate to law enforcement. Be aware of what's possible, ensure your community witness is present, and fully consider all options.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This information is educational only, not legal advice. Laws vary by location and situation. Consult a qualified attorney for specific legal guidance about your circumstances. Qommittee does not provide legal services or create attorney-client relationships.

Recommendations from the Crash Override Network:

"Before contacting the police, it's good to have a goal in mind. Do you want to establish a record of what's happening to you? Are you afraid of being SWATted? Do you want to get a restraining order? Knowing this ahead of time can help you ask the right questions of the police, and make it easier to handle the situation properly. The trauma of talking about the abuse you're facing, combined with the anxiety of talking with cops in general can be a nasty combination to have to fight through, and preparation can help you be more effective at handling the situation. Consider even looking at a sample police report to see what kind of information they might be asking of you. Try to think through your answers to these questions before calling,

and keep them fresh in your mind. If you feel like it might help, write your planned responses down beforehand so you can keep your composure." (source)

Take care of yourself

Online harassment and doxxing can feel violating and cause feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, and paranoia. After taking the appropriate protective measures, consider taking a break from social media to make space for emotional processing and recovery. It is natural to want to monitor the activity online. Ask somebody you trust to do it for you so you can protect your mental and physical wellbeing. You can also set up filters on Gmail to auto-archive messages from particular people or with particular keywords, and/or forward them to someone else, so that a trusted person can keep an eye on certain kinds of email without the person under attack bearing the mental load of reading it.

> **"Take time to be offline. It is okay to disconnect. It is okay if everybody doesn't hear from you all of the time."**
>
> **–Maxine LaQueene**

REAL LIFE PROFILES

Jack King Goff

Cyberbullying

The Situation:

A high school teacher's drag king identity was exposed and shared in an anti-LGBTQ+ Facebook group, despite the teacher maintaining strict separation between professional and personal lives. All it took was one tagged Instagram photo from over five years prior to connect the individual to their drag persona. The teacher had disclosed their drag persona with their superiors before they accepted a job with the school district, and said the news was received warmly. There were even colleagues attending their shows in support! However, an anti-LGBTQ+ group reported them to the district and a local right wing influencer targeted them repeatedly in online videos.

The Response:

Local media reached out to Jack for their side of the story to be heard without the lens of bigotry, gaining coverage in local TV and online publications. Additionally they had a conversation with Qommittee, including advice from legal professionals and data protection services. After social media harassment and organizing by a local anti-LGBTQ+ hate group, the teacher took leave and ultimately resigned due to safety concerns.

Lessons:

- Use completely separate emails, usernames, and photos for drag and professional identities
- Check regularly if your non-drag accounts are tagged in drag-related material online
- Review workplace discrimination policies and document all employer communications
- Reach out to organizations and local media with your story to make sure you can also use your voice when being bullied
- If possible, pay for a data removal service to remove any personal information from public online spaces

Learn More: The Stranger | Real Change

Maxine LaQueene

Political Targeting and Online Harassment

The Situation:

During 2023 protests against anti-trans legislation in Texas, LaQueene was forcibly removed from the House Gallery. Video evidence showed a trooper grabbing LaQueene by the arm and yanking her from her seat despite her verbal requests to "let go of me now." A state representative posted a photo from the incident of LaQueene in a skirt bending over to help a friend having a panic attack, and implied that she was intentionally being lewd. She received death threats for weeks on all of her social media platforms and by email.

The Response:

She publicly clarified she was helping a friend and was unaware of her exposure. Despite this explanation, she reported being banned from returning to the Capitol and faced continued online harassment. Nevertheless, LaQueene has demonstrated immense resilience and continued her advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights in Texas. In May 2025, she returned to the Capitol to testify against Senate Bill 18, which would strip public funding from libraries hosting drag story hours. When Committee Chair Ken King cut her off mid-sentence as she asked if any representatives had actually seen a drag show, LaQueene later remarked, "I'm tired of being nice and playing nice politics. These legislators aren't playing nice."

LaQueene has also become Qo-Founder of Qommittee, a national coalition of drag artists providing support and resources to performers facing threats and discrimination.

Lessons:

- Document your participation in political events with video when possible—LaQueene's TikTok video provided crucial context showing she was not resisting officers
- Be aware that images can be decontextualized and weaponized by politicians and media on social media
- Have support people accompany you to political events as witnesses and to document interactions
- If misrepresented, quickly provide your side of the story to trusted media outlets
- Don't give up. Period.

Learn More: Dallas Voice | TIME Magazine | The Austin Chronicle

Brittany Lynn

Digital Security and Community Resilience

The Situation:

Philadelphia-based drag queen Brittany Lynn, founder of Philly Drag Mafia, built a substantial following for her Drag Queen Storytime program, connecting with over 8,000 families since launching in 2015. After experiencing escalating harassment that included death threats following the 2024 presidential election, her situation intensified when online trolls discovered her personal information and harassed her, even threatening to harm her pet dog.

The Response:

Lynn made the strategic decision to delete her public Facebook page to limit access to her personal information. She pivoted to more protected communication channels and returned to grassroots promotion methods like physical flyers and venue partnerships. She did not let the hate deter her, and she achieved a Guinness World Record for "largest attendance at a drag queen story time reading" at the National Constitution Center in June 2024.

Lessons:

- Create separate, more secure communication channels for genuine supporters
- Build strong relationships with venues and organizations who can help promote your events
- Turn challenges into opportunities to demonstrate community strength and resilience

Learn More: Drag Queen Storytime World Record | Brittany Lynn's Story

THREATS OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Threats of violence and harassment at drag shows are shockingly commonplace across the country. Bomb, mass shooting and death threats, armed protests, attacks and intimidation are compounded by a severe and justifiable trust deficit between drag performers and law enforcement—who can be seen as hostile or ambivalent.

Threats of violence against drag performers or venues require immediate attention to both safety and legal documentation.

These threats are often criminal acts and taking steps to ensure security, to alert law enforcement, to do community organizing and engage with the media and policymakers can make an important difference.

When Facing Threats:

- Ensure immediate safety and contact law enforcement and, if needed, have a community witness present for law enforcement interactions
- Document everything (screenshots, recordings, witness information)
- Organize community and media to be aware of what's happening
- Consider enhanced security, community support and other measures to ensure safety

When You Need Security

Planning for safety is essential:

1. **Assess the risk level**
    - Research if similar events in your area have faced protests
    - Monitor social media for organized opposition
    - Take all threats seriously and document them
2. **Work with venue security**
    - Discuss security plans with venue management
    - Determine who is responsible for security costs
    - Ensure security personnel are briefed on potential issues
3. **Build a community safety team**
    - Identify friendly community members who can serve as monitors
    - Create clear roles and communication protocols
    - Train vetted volunteers on de-escalation techniques
4. **Coordinate with law enforcement when necessary**

> "Check with the venue ahead of time if there has been opposition to the event. Ask them: Are you getting any strange calls or emails? Have you dealt with a situation where you needed to get extra security?"
>
> –Harmonica Sunbeam

- Report serious threats to local police
- Request police presence or mobile police camera unit, if appropriate
- Have a designated liaison to communicate with officers

5. **Develop entry and exit plans**
    - Create a safe arrival process for performers
    - Identify secure areas within the venue
    - Plan alternate exit routes if needed

> **"We use a mobile police camera unit at every drag story hour. It's an easier way to show detractors that they are being monitored without having police officers there."**
>
> **–Veranda L'Ni**

Working With Law Enforcement

For good reason, drag performers may be apprehensive of or not trusting in law enforcement. This is reasonable. That's why we recommend:

- Having a community witness present if not comfortable with police
- Documenting all interactions
- Knowing your rights and local procedures
- Following up consistently on investigations
- Keep detailed records of all case numbers and contacts
- Working with community leaders who can assist and engage in law enforcement interactions
- Alerting the media to threats and local law enforcement responses to ensure transparency

Many communities have LGBTQ+ liaison officers or hate crime units that may provide a more informed response.

Building these relationships before problems arise can be valuable. Additionally, consider getting to know your local National Lawyers Guild chapter, whose members are trained to observe police during protests and may be available to monitor necessary interactions.

Local vs. Federal

Local Police Department: Understanding local and state law enforcement practices and building community relationships in advance can be crucial for effective response.

- First responders for immediate threats or emergencies
- Jurisdiction over most in-person threats and local crimes
- Contact via: 911 for emergencies, non-emergency line for other concerns
- May have LGBTQ+ liaison officers or hate crime units
- Varies widely in LGBTQ+ competency and responsiveness

FBI: Federal law prohibits threats transmitted across state lines or targeting federally protected rights.

- Hate crimes and threats based on identity
- Bomb threats and violent threats
- Interstate harassment
- Contact via: local field office (fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices), 1-800-CALL-FBI, or tips.fbi.gov
- Ask specifically for Civil Rights/Hate Crimes coordinator
    - ★ We recognize that changes to civil rights enforcement at the federal level means that this advice may not be pertinent or appropriate. We are monitoring the changes and will update the handbook as we learn more.

SAFETY-FIRST

Your safety and comfort should guide your decision on whether and how to engage with federal agencies.

- Consider reporting through LGBTQ+ organizations or legal advocates
- Have community witnesses present during interactions
- Document all communications and meetings
- Know you can end interactions if you feel unsafe
- Request specific units trained in hate crimes when possible

Community Organizing And Media Engagement

When drag performers face threats, bans, or harassment, organizing your community and strategically engaging with media can be powerful tools for protection and solidarity.

Building Community Coalitions

Effective community organizing includes:

- Identifying key allies before a crisis occurs
    - LGBTQ+ organizations and community centers
    - Supportive faith communities, businesses, and civic groups
    - Allied elected officials and community leaders
- Creating a rapid response network
    - Establish communication channels that can be activated quickly
    - Assign specific roles for emergency situations
    - Build a volunteer base for event security, witness support, and documentation
- Developing solidarity events
    - Turn threats into opportunities for community celebration
    - Invite community leaders to participate alongside performers
    - Create events that demonstrate the joy and resilience of drag

Effective Media Engagement

Control the narrative around threats and harassment

- Develop clear, consistent messaging that emphasizes art, expression, and joy
- Prepare concise talking points focused on community values
- Identify articulate spokespeople who can represent your perspective

Build relationships with journalists

- Connect with local reporters before crises occur
- Provide background information on drag culture and history
- Offer exclusive access to respectful media outlets

Alternatives to Law Enforcement

There are many reasons why someone might choose not to involve law enforcement. For individuals who have previously been victimized by the police or courts, who are sex workers, undocumented, part of a targeted demographic, or who lack the resources to navigate the criminal legal system, engaging with that system can be personally risky. Given these and other challenges, working with an unjust system may not feel right for you.

There are alternatives to law enforcement. Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs and other community-focused models, often intertwined with transformative justice, aim to reduce violence without relying on punitive tactics. Such programs focus on prevention, intervention, and addressing the root causes of violence. Transformative justice, in turn, emphasizes healing, accountability, and addressing systemic issues that contribute to violence, offering alternatives to traditional punitive approaches and assisting victims who would rather not work within the criminal legal system.

> **"Queer gender benders are more likely to be arrested and let down by the legal system than their cishetero counterparts. As a mixed-race queer educator, activist, and survivor of sexual violence, I work hard to re-imagine my drag artivism by using every opportunity to promote community alternatives to address the root cause of violence and to end generational cycles of systemic abuse."**
>
> **–Professor Sanchez**

Some examples include Oakland APTP, CAT 911 in the Los Angeles-area, and Common Justice in New York City and nationally. Other LGBTQ+ community-based organizations

like Sequeerity in Minnesota, and the Rainbow Defense Coalition in the Washington, DC-area, partner with drag artists to conduct security checks, de-escalate conflict, and protect event attendees from counter-protestors.

We might be able to help find an alternative for you, contact dragisjoy@qommittee.org and we can try to connect you with local CVI organizations.

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REAL LIFE PROFILES

Tara Hoot

Repeated Targeting: Bomb Threats and Protests

The Situation:

Washington D.C.-based drag performer Tara Hoot, who specializes in family-friendly events, has been the target of at least eight bomb threats since 2023 and frequent instances of anti-LGBTQ+ protestors standing outside the venue. At one performance, the venue had to be evacuated while protesters harassed attendees outside.

The Response:

Rather than canceling performances, Hoot continues her events with bravery and determination. She's increased security measures, involved with law enforcement, and engaged with elected officials who have denounced the threats. She's worked with the Rainbow Defense Coalition, whose volunteers do security checks and stand in a wall of rainbow umbrellas to shield event-goers from anti-LGBTQ+ protesters.

From the Rainbow Defense Coalition | @rdc_dmv

Lessons:

- Develop emergency evacuation plans in advance with venues
- Build relationships with supportive community groups who can provide physical protection
- Document all threats and file police reports for each incident
- Create partnerships with local elected officials who can publicly denounce threats
- Maintain a defiant public stance that emphasizes the positive impact of your work

Learn More: LGBTQ Nation Profile | The Advocate Coverage

Madame Sassysquatch the Rafting Queen

Community Response to Threats

The Situation:

In July 2024, a 28-year-old man threatened to "shoot up" the Fresh Drag Show at Schmiggity's Live Music & Dance Bar in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Following his arrest, performers had to decide whether to continue their events in the small mountain community.

The Response:

Rather than canceling future shows, Madame Sassysquatch and the performers organized "A Night of Drag Delight and Defiance" with community leaders performing alongside them in solidarity. The show featured enhanced security funded by Queer Futures and a guest performance by Finnish Hymn Alnite, a Club Q performer.

"We want all of Colorado to know that we are here to stay. We celebrate everyone and no threat is ever going to stop us from being who we are." – Madame Sassysquatch

Lessons:

- Transform threats into community organizing opportunities
- Involve community leaders to create powerful solidarity statements
- Secure additional resources for event security
- Use media coverage to highlight your positive community impact

Learn More: The Colorado Sun: Drag show of defiance

Naomi Dix

Resilience During Power Grid Attack

The Situation:

During a December 2022 drag fundraiser at Sunrise Theater in Moore County, North Carolina, attackers shot up two electrical substations, causing a widespread power outage affecting 45,000 people. The attack occurred just as Dix's performance began, plunging the theater into darkness amid protests outside the venue.

The Response:

Rather than canceling the show, Dix demonstrated remarkable leadership in the moment of crisis. She directed the audience of 370 guests to turn on their cell phone lights to illuminate the venue and led them in singing Beyoncé's "Halo" together. In the aftermath, Dix continued to speak out at rallies and press conferences, framing the attack as part of a broader pattern of threats against LGBTQ+ communities. She later opened her own venue, Club ERA, in Durham and continues organizing community events.

"This is not a moment to silence yourself. This is a moment to speak up and speak out." -Naomi Dix

Lessons:

- Continue public advocacy after attacks to combat fear and build broader support
- Recognize that attacks on drag are often connected to broader political extremism
- Respond to crisis with creative leadership that brings people together

Learn More: ABC45 | Facing South | News & Observer

Harmonica Sunbeam

Perseverance and Focus Through Recurring Threats

The Situation:

Harmonica Sunbeam, a veteran drag performer and comedy queen, has faced an escalating pattern of disruptions, protests and bomb threats targeting her Drag Story Hour events across New Jersey. Despite these threats occurring at many venues, ranging from libraries to parks to community centers, Sunbeam has continued to host approximately 100 Drag Story Hour events annually.

The Response:

Sunbeam has developed strategies to continue her literacy work while maintaining safety. She requires advanced registration for her Story Hour events to increase the security of the space. She maintains a policy of non-engagement with protesters, focuses on creating positive experiences for children and families, and builds strong relationships with supportive venues and officials. Law enforcement and local elected officials have increasingly recognized these threats as bias crimes and have committed resources to investigations, with the NJ Attorney General's office becoming directly involved in recent cases.

"I've learned not to engage with them because their minds are set on what they think this is all about." – Harmonica Sunbeam

Lessons:

- Requiring advance registration for events can keep unwanted disruptors out
- Maintain focus on the positive impact rather than engaging with protesters
- Continue programming despite intimidation to demonstrate resilience to the community

Learn More: NJ.com | Two River Times

FIRST AMENDMENT PROTECTIONS FOR DRAG PERFORMERS

As a drag performer, your expression is protected under the First Amendment. And while taking legal action can be a very hard process, you do have many rights to perform under the law.

Here's what you need to know:

- Your performances are constitutionally protected speech. Drag shows are a form of artistic expression that courts have recognized as protected by the First Amendment, including by the Eleventh Circuit Court in May, 2025.
- Government venues cannot discriminate against you based on content. Public libraries, community centers, parks, and other government-run venues cannot deny you access simply because you perform in drag.
- Special permits cannot be required only for drag shows. If other performances don't need special permits, neither should yours.
- You cannot be banned from public spaces simply for being in drag. Courts have consistently struck down laws that single out drag performers.

But There Are Limitations

While the First Amendment provides strong protection, there are important limitations:

- Private venues can set their own content policies
- Content-neutral regulations that apply to all performances are permitted
- Explicit sexual content/obscenity can be regulated regardless of the type of performance
- Government-imposed security requirements are allowed if applied equally to all events, including non-drag events
- The same legal logic that protects your right to perform might also protect anti-drag protesters' right to be present in or around your space, plan accordingly

WHAT THE COURTS HAVE DECIDED

Courts are affirming what performers have known all along: drag is art, and art is protected speech. In the last month alone, we've seen two major federal court victories that provide Pride organizers and performers with powerful legal precedent to defend against discriminatory restrictions.

On May 12, 2025, a federal judge struck down Naples, Florida's attempts to force drag indoors and impose age restrictions.
Read the opinion for *Naples Pride v City of Naples* here.

On May 13, 2025, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld its block on Florida's statewide drag ban.
Read the opinion for HM Florida-ORL, LLC v. Governor here.

What These Rulings Means For You:

1. Drag Performance = Protected Speech

- Drag performance is **inherently expressive conduct** protected by the First Amendment
- The context of Pride events reinforces the expressive nature of these performances

2. Cities Cannot Force Drag Shows Indoors

The courts struck down requirements that drag performances be held indoors, ruling:

- Moving performances indoors based on "security concerns" is **viewpoint discrimination** that violates the first amendment
- Cities cannot give in to a "heckler's veto" by restricting speech due to potential hostile reactions
- Public safety concerns "cannot overcome the First Amendment" (*Naples Pride*, pg. 33)

3. Age Restrictions Are Unconstitutional

Courts have invalidated sweeping age restrictions on drag:

- Age restrictions based on the "perceived impropriety" of drag are **viewpoint-based restrictions** that violate the first amendment

- Family-friendly drag performances without explicit content cannot be age-restricted
- State drag bans have been declared unconstitutional and cannot justify restrictions

4. Security Fees Must Be Content-Neutral

Cities cannot impose higher security fees based on the content of performances:

- Fees based on anticipated hostile reactions to drag are unconstitutional
- Only actual, content-neutral security costs can be charged
- Pride organizations cannot be forced to pay for counter-protesters' reactions

Practical Steps When Booking Public Venues

Before Booking

1. **Research the venue's policies**
    - Request written policies on performance content and booking procedures
    - Ask if similar events have been held there before
    - Find out if there are any special requirements for performances
2. **Document everything in writing**
    - Communicate via email when possible
    - Confirm verbal agreements in follow-up emails
    - Keep copies of all application forms and correspondence
    - If you are set to perform, see if the venue will sign a contract that confirms the details of your event
3. **Be clear about your performance**
    - Provide an accurate but general description of your show
    - Clarify the intended audience (all-ages, 18+, etc.)
    - Specify technical and space needs
4. **Build community support proactively**
    - Don't wait until you're denied to organize
    - Identify potential allies and supporters before applying
    - Make connections with local LGBTQ+ organizations
    - Reach out to other performers who have successfully booked the venue

If You Face Resistance or Denial

1. **Request specific reasons in writing**
    - Ask: "What specific policy does my event violate?"
    - Request the written policy that justifies the denial
    - If they cite "community standards," ask for those standards in writing
2. **Document discriminatory treatment**
    - Note if similar non-drag events have been approved
    - Record names, dates, and content of all communications

- Save emails, voicemails, and text messages

3. **Identify the decision maker**
   - Determine who has actual authority to approve events
   - Find out if there's an appeals process
   - Research if the venue has a board or oversight committee
4. **Activate your community network**
   - Alert your pre-identified supporters about the situation
   - Ask allies to contact the venue expressing support for your event
   - Coordinate social media response if appropriate

Responding To A Denial

When a public venue denies your request to perform, you have several options, depending on your resources and goals:

Immediate Response Options

1. **Request a formal appeal or review, but don't wait to take action.**
   - Many public institutions have an appeals process. Call for an appeal and make your case.
   - Request a hearing with the venue's head, board or oversight committee. Don't wait for a hearing to take action though. Make your case to the public through other ways in the meantime.
2. **Mobilize your support network online, in the media and in protest**
   - Ask allies to attend public meetings
   - Have community members speak about the value of your performance
   - Create a coordinated message emphasizing First Amendment principles
   - Engage with the media
3. **Find an alternate venue and hold a bigger, bolder event**
   - Don't give up! Find an alternative venue that wants to celebrate you and your art
   - Mobilize as a countermeasure to show that bigotry has no place in your community
   - Hold a bigger, bolder event, inviting any or all allies to join

Legal Response Options

1. **Send a demand letter**
   - Have an attorney write a letter explaining your First Amendment rights
   - Cite relevant court cases that protect drag performances
   - Set a deadline for response before further action
2. **File a complaint with relevant government agencies**
   - Contact your state's civil rights commission
   - Report to local human rights commissions

- File with the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division*

3. **Consider legal action**
    - Consult with civil rights attorneys
    - Connect with organizations that provide pro bono representation
    - Be prepared for a potentially lengthy process

* *We recognize that changes to civil rights enforcement at the federal level means that this advice may not be pertinent or appropriate. We are monitoring the changes and will update the handbook as we learn more.*

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REAL LIFE PROFILES

Draggieland at Texas A&M University

Ban at a Public University

In 2025, Texas A&M University attempted to ban "Draggieland," an annual drag pageant. The student group organizing the event, the Queer Empowerment Council, took these steps:

1. They **documented that their event had been approved in previous years** (since 2020) and that this form of ban was not the first instance to happen within the university system
2. They **identified that the ban came from the Board of Regents**, not regular venue staff
3. They **activated their campus and community support network** through a petition, a call for action, and protests.
4. They partnered with FIRE to **file a lawsuit arguing First Amendment violations**
5. A federal judge ruled in their favor, noting that anyone offended by the performance has "a simple remedy: don't go"

Southern Utah Drag Stars

City Permit Denial

When the city of St. George, Utah denied a permit for a family-friendly drag show in 2023:

1. The performers **documented that the city's stated reason, "advertising violation" was a pretext** (a reason given in justification of a course of action that is not the real reason)
2. They **mobilized community support** to show public interest in the event
3. They **partnered with the ACLU to file a lawsuit**
4. A judge granted an injunction allowing the show to proceed
5. Eventually, the city **settled the case, publicly apologized, and admitted violating the performers' First Amendment rights**

PROTECTIONS AGAINST DEFAMATION

This section was created in partnership with the Equality Legal Action Fund, which provides pro bono (or free) legal services to members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community who have been defamed through a nationwide network of attorneys. Please contact Meg Phelan, Equality Legal Action Fund's Legal Counsel, at meg.phelan@equalityactionfund.org with any specific questions or to seek assistance.

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DEFAMATION: Any false information that harms the reputation of a person, business, or organization

This section is about protecting against: False accusations of crimes (e.g., called a "groomer" or pedophile) or being unfit in one's profession due to a drag persona/performance, fabricated claims about the sexual nature of performances, and the claim is made either online, in person, or in some other public forum.

When someone makes false statements that damage your reputation, you may have legal recourse through defamation law. Recent cases demonstrate how performers can fight back against false claims:

Important Note on "Grooming" Allegations: Recent cases have established that false accusations of "grooming" or pedophilia may constitute defamation per se in many jurisdictions, meaning damages are presumed due to the severity of the allegation. State laws vary significantly and are chronicled by the Digital Media Law Project:

- Some states require proof of actual financial damages
- Others presume damages for accusations of serious crimes
- Statutes of limitations range from 1-3 years
- Standards for public vs. private figures differ by state

To Prove Defamation, You Must Establish These Elements:

A False Statement Presented as Fact

- The statement must be provably false
- It must be presented as fact, not just opinion or hyperbole

Publication to Others

Spreading the false information to others, in ways such as:

- Social media posts (but someone sharing a post with defamatory material only counts if they post new defamatory material with it)
- Private messages, if shared with a third party
- Public statements
- Media interviews

Fault

Whether a person is legally responsible for making a false and harmful statement depends on their level of fault—basically, how careless or intentional they were when making the statement. If you have evidence that the person knows the statement is false, that is really helpful! There are two main standards of fault:

- **Negligence-** This applies when the person making the statement did not take reasonable care to check if it was true before saying it. This is the standard used when private individuals (regular people) sue for defamation.
- **Actual Malice-** The person making the statement knew it was false or acted with reckless disregard for whether it was true or not. This is the standard used when public figures (like celebrities or politicians) sue for defamation.

Harm to Reputation or Business

- Lost bookings or income (including lost wages/termination from employment)
- Professional damage (either as a drag performer or in another capacity)
- Emotional distress
- Any other monetary damages attributable to the defamatory material

If You Believe You Have Been Defamed:

- Do not engage in retaliatory behavior towards the individual(s) (e.g. do not doxx, harass, or respond).

- Take screenshots of the defamatory material, including the date/time and name of the person, or save the audio/video file, if one is available.
- Send the screenshot(s) and/or audio/video files directly to the Equality Legal Action Fund or Qommittee.

The Equality Legal Action Fund provides pro bono (or free) legal services to members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community who have been defamed through a nationwide network of attorneys. Please contact Meg Phelan, Equality Legal Action Fund's Legal Counsel, at meg.phelan@equalityactionfund.org with any specific questions or to seek assistance.

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REAL LIFE PROFILES

Mona Liza Million

Sustained Legal Action Against Defamation

The Situation:

A performer at Pride in the Park in Idaho was falsely accused of exposing their genitals when a blogger posted doctored video with their crotch area blurred. Despite a city prosecutor confirming "the unedited video recordings do not depict any exposure," the false claims continued.

The Response:

The performer pursued a two-step legal strategy: first suing the blogger (winning a $1.1 million verdict), then filing a second lawsuit against an anti-LGBTQ+ organization that continued spreading the claims despite cease-and-desist letters.

Learn More: NBC News | Idaho Statesman

Monique Toosoon & Clara Divine

Holding Officials Accountable

The Situation:

In 2022, a New Hampshire state representative falsely claimed during official legislative proceedings that one drag performer was a "convicted sex offender" and another had engaged in inappropriate conduct with children.

The Response:

The performers filed a defamation lawsuit against the representative. In August 2024, they secured a settlement of $100,000 each plus a public retraction and apology.

Lessons:

- Document false statements made by public officials
- Pursue formal legal remedies even after receiving private apologies
- Require public retractions as part of any settlement

Learn More: Washington Post | Boston.com

EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION PROTECTIONS

Drag performers often face harassment that extends beyond their art into their careers. We've seen numerous cases where performers faced targeting at their jobs. Federal, state, and local laws may provide protection against such discrimination:

Federal Protections:

Title VII prohibits discrimination based on sex, including gender expression:

- Applies to employers with 15+ employees
- Protects against harassment and retaliation
- Covers discriminatory policies
- Includes hostile work environment

A NOTE ON TITLE VII

In *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020), the Supreme Court determined that Title VII prohibits workplace discrimination based on gender identity. However, in 2025 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission decided to abandon enforcement of *Bostock* regarding gender identity discrimination. This may make it more challenging for transgender individuals to get their claims resolved through the EEOC, but the legal protections under Title VII remain in place.

State/Local Protections:

Check your area. Many jurisdictions provide additional protections:

- Lower employee thresholds
- Explicit protections for gender expression
- Stronger remedies
- Local enforcement options

Public Employee Rights:

Government employees have additional constitutional protections:

- First Amendment expression rights
- Due process requirements
- Equal protection guarantees
- Whistleblower protections

If You Face Workplace Discrimination:

Document Everything

- Save all communications
- Keep performance reviews
- Record discriminatory comments
- Maintain timeline of events

Follow Proper Procedures

- Review employee handbooks for the rules and procedures—Don't let them throw your case out on a technicality!
- File internal complaints
- Meet reporting deadlines

Consider Legal Action

- Gather evidence
- Consult an employment attorney

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MENTAL HEALTH

Facing threats and harassment can take a significant toll on your mental health and wellbeing. This section provides resources and strategies for taking care of yourself and finding community support.

Common Reactions to Harassment

It's normal to experience:

- Anxiety and fear
- Difficulty sleeping
- Hypervigilance
- Social withdrawal
- Depression
- Anger
- Reduced confidence
- Questioning your art

REMEMBER: These are normal responses to abnormal situations. Seeking help is a sign of strength.

Self-Care Strategies

- **Set boundaries** on social media consumption
- **Connect with supportive community** members
- **Maintain routines** when possible
- **Practice relaxation techniques** (meditation, deep breathing)
- **Engage in joyful activities** unrelated to drag
- **Consider limiting performance schedule** temporarily if needed
- **Document positive feedback** from supportive audience members

Professional Support

LGBT National Help Center

- Hotline: 888-843-4564
- Website: glbthotline.org

Trevor Project

- Crisis Intervention: 866-488-7386 | Text: START to 678678
- Website: thetrevorproject.org

Trans Lifeline

- Hotline: 877-565-8860
- Website: translifeline.org/

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This handbook would not exist without the brilliance and generosity of many contributors—performers, lawyers, organizers, and friends—who shared their time, insights, and lived experiences. We are especially grateful to the drag artists who generously shared their wisdom and insights, offered feedback, and helped shape this resource from start to finish.

Drag Performers and Producers

- **Angelo Rios (College Station, TX) -** *Draggieland Showrunner for the Texas A&M Queer Empowerment Council (TAMU QEC), plaintiffs in a free speech lawsuit to stop TAMU's drag ban.*
- **Blaq Dinamyte (Washington, DC)** - *DC-based drag king and president of Qommittee.*
- **Brittany Lynn (Philadelphia, PA)** - *Founder of Philly Drag Mafia who faced death threats for her Drag Queen Storytime program. Despite these challenges, she helped Philadelphia achieve a Guinness World Record for "largest attendance at a drag queen story time reading."*
- **Cali Je (Pocatello, Idaho)** - *Life-long Idahoan, picture book reader, and co-founder of Reading Time with the Queens program in Southeast Idaho. Cali has been recognized by the ACLU of Idaho for political activism and organizing for LGBTQ+ rights.*
- **Freddie Hercury (Buffalo, NY)** - *Drag king and community organizer whose 2024 Pride Month show was subject to a bomb threat.*
- **Harmonica Sunbeam (New Jersey)** - *A veteran performer and comedy queen whose resilience and dedication to literacy have inspired communities across New Jersey despite facing repeated threats.*
- **Jack King Goff (Seattle, WA)** - *Drag king who experienced doxxing and online harassment and was forced from their teaching job because of a campaign from anti-LGBTQ+ activists.*
- **Maxine LaQueene (Austin, TX)** - *Austin-based drag artist and trans activist who was doxxed and harassed online after testifying against an anti-trans/anti-drag bill in Texas.*
- **Mitski Avalox (St. George, UT) -** *Utah-based drag performer and founder of the Southern Utah Drag Stars, plaintiffs in the free speech lawsuit Southern Utah Drag Stars vs City of St. George*

- **Professor Sanchez aka Dyke Daddy aka Sub 1 (Long Beach, CA)** - *California-based drag king and member of Qommittee's Peer Support Qollective*

- **Sebastian Katz (Washington, DC)** - *DC-based drag king.*

- **Veranda L'ni (Cleveland, OH)** - *Cleveland-based drag performer who had a venue firebombed in a 2023 hate crime and an event protested by extremist groups.*

Legal Experts and Community Allies

- **Melissa Stewart**, civil rights attorney with Donati Law and a lead litigation expert fighting drag bans across states.

- **Meg Phelan**, Equality Legal Action Fund's Legal Counsel and an expert on how LGBTQ+ people can protect themselves from defamation.

- **Luna Isaiah Floyd,** Equal Justice Works fellow at Lambda Legal

- **Kendra Albert,** a public interest technology and media law attorney at Albert Sellars LLP.

- **CenterLink**, The Community of LGBTQ Centers

We thank **David Spears** from Magic Box for providing artistic direction, and **Cassidy DuHon** with DuHon Photography for the cover photo (taken at a drag performer-led protest at the Kennedy Center organized by the DMV Social Activist Collective in March, 2025).

This handbook was assembled and edited by our Qommunity Organizers, **Julian Applebaum** and **Scott Simpson**, assisted by Qommittee's intern, **Hulda Stenroos**.

QOMMITTEE

THE DRAG DEFENSE HANDBOOK

IS A PUBLICATION OF QOMMITTEE AND THE QOMMITTEE FOR QREATIVE FREEDOM, POWERED BY VOLUNTEER DRAG PERFORMERS, PRO BONO LEGAL EXPERTS, AND QOMMUNITY ORGANIZERS.

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